

## BEING A GOOD AMBASSADOR AND MORE

*“Twenty years from now you'll be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines, sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream.” Discover. Mark Twain*

What makes a good ambassador? the successful ambassador is above all the good guest. Keep these things in mind

**Keep an open mind:** This is the ability to keep one's opinions flexible and receptive to new stimuli. The fewer expectations, preconceptions and private agendas you have, the more successful your experience will be. After all, the joy of discovery as a surprise.

**Have a sense of humor:** The ability to laugh and find humor in things helps guard against disappointment and frustration. Be quick to overlook and slow to lose your sense of humor.

**Be flexible and adaptable:** The ability to cope with new situations as well as keeping options open and judgmental behavior to a minimum will enable you to enjoy new and different experiences. Your hosts have agreed to welcome you into their homes without reimbursement. Allow them to be hospitable. Be open to their attentiveness, and the ways they express it. Let your host family take charge of your life for a week. You won't be disappointed.

**Have a positive regard for others:** Remember the ability to express warmth, empathy, respect, positive regard for others with the willingness to communicate is important. Keep in mind the duties of a good guest and don't take advantage of your host's hospitality. Be sensitive to hosts whose economic resources may be more limited than your own. It may or may not be appropriate to help with the extra expenses your visit occasions. Remember your hosts are proud people; feel your way with your heart in this matter.

**To show your appreciation,** you'll want to bring along a gift for your hosts. This, in addition to a warm note of thanks left behind in the

guest-room, is a very personal way to show your gratitude for your host attentiveness.

**Concentrate on experience** of sharing a week in the lives of your hosts. Accept this time as a gift from this tiny planet we call home. You may never come this way again. Your new friends are waiting. Enjoy.

Initially when we go to a new country everything is new and exciting, but after a couple of weeks the cultural adjustments can become tiring and we start wondering why they can't just do things the "right way." Be a good sport, bite your tongue, and go with the flow. We are there to learn about their culture, not to instruct them in how to improve, or be like us.

### **A few more "hints".**

Be sensitively aware of the feeling of other people (hosts and your fellow travelers.) Thus preventing what might be offensive behavior on your part.

If you hope to meet up with your long-lost cousin, let your hosts know this before your visit. They're planning activities to do with you, and may not appreciate a sudden alteration of plans because your cousin is showing up in town. This goes for activities you may wish to do also. Discuss this with your host ahead of time.

Take along photographs of your home, family and community to share with your hosts so that they have a better understanding of you. This may be easiest on a digital device.

**Refresh** your knowledge of history, demographics and geography of your own community and that of the country you're visiting.

**Punctuality** is a must for all activities. One person's tardiness affects the entire group. Be patient if lines are long and service is slow.

**Be independent.** Enjoy the activities your host has planned for you, but be able to amuse yourself as well. Explore the neighborhood write

postcards, read, play with the children, or go on sightseeing or shopping excursions when the family is busy.

**Be sensitive** to your host's interest. If your hosts love to do an activity that you don't care about, please go with the flow, at least part of the time. This may include going to church of a different faith with them on Sunday. Or the reverse, if you sense that they just dislike an activity, for example shopping, don't request that they take you to stores.

**Be reasonable** about your purchases of souvenirs. Don't let shopping seem more important than making friends and learning about different cultures.

Remember that many problems work themselves out (it's only for seven days.) If a hosting situation poses a real problem, ambassadors are expected to exercise tact and diplomacy. First address the problem with your host. When all else fails contact the exchange directors.

Before you arrive, be sure to let your host know about your food allergies or aversions, physical limitations, phobias, etc. Food allergies or preferences have been communicated to your host. If they are not abiding by this, gently mention it to them. I considered physical limitations when accepting participants. However things can change between the time we began the planning process until we depart, so if you now have limitations, please communicate these to your host. I did not ask for comment nor did I mention phobia to hosts. If you have a phobia that you think might interfere with your participation in any event by all means communicate that to your host and me.

Cultivate the habit of listening and sharing, rather than merely hearing and seeing. Instead of knowing all the answers, ask questions.

Spending time reflecting on your daily experiences in an attempt to deepen your understanding.

## Gift ideas for your hosts

Here are just a few ideas. I think this is difficult because I never want to bring something that was not made in the USA. Trying to be unique is difficult, perhaps you have other ideas to share with me.

Think of the family you will stay with, but also think of little things for dinner hosts. The following list could be used for either . \*Calendars of photos of your town or area.

\*Local history/picture books online handmade notecards with local photographs

\*Craft items from the local market, or that you've made yourself if

you're talented

\*Handmade soaps, lotions, room air spray

\*Fine chocolates

\*Local consumables Maple syrup, Wisconsin cheeses, Michigan dried cherries and blueberries. Perhaps a local wine. You might check with your hosts if they would consume this.

\*Jelly bellies (these are made in the USA, and are different)

\*Things from native cultures.

\*CDs of American music. This could include Native American flute or Hawaiian music or perhaps Tennessee country-western folk. They do love a "beat" in Brazil.

\* At your Chamber of Commerce for you might find pins, pens, T-shirts and mugs

Local arts and crafts fairs and festivals may hold the secret for unique items.